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AUTHOR Budig, Jeanne E.
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ABSTRACT

Aware of the high correlation between class attendance and academic success, Vincennes University (VU) in Indiana implemented a "blue card" system to improve class attendance. The first week of class, students are asked to sign a blue card verifying their local address and allowing the release of academic information. Instructors begin class by discussing the importance of attendance and explaining that the tear-off portions of the blue cards will be used to notify students that the instructor is concerned about their absences. When students begin to miss class, postcards are sent to the student's local and permanent addresses. The first card indicates concern over non-attendance, the second is more strongly worded, and the third informs the student that he/she has been dropped for non-attendance and has received a grade of W or WF. The cost of the program is approximately $465 per year. Parents and academic advisors unanimously support the program, and students unanimously dislike it. Data collected during the 5 years of program operation indicate the following: (1) overall card usage increased each fall semester from 5,529 (#1 cards) in 1990 to 6,230 in fall 1994; (2) campuswide, about 20% of the students receive #1 cards, with students in academic transfer courses more likely to receive these warnings than occupational students (22% vs 15% in 1994); (3) card usage was highest in Humanities and Social Sciences courses, and lowest in Health Occupations courses; (4) about half of the students who receive #1 cards receive #2 cards; (5) the use of the "blue card system" enhanced student success and reduced the proportion of D and F grades, particularly for students in developmental courses and early morning courses. (Nine data tables and three graphs are included.) (KP)

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Postcards for Student Success

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A Paper Presented at the
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Dr. Jeanne E. Budig
Assistant to the President for Research and Planning
Vincennes University
Vincennes Indiana 47591
812-888-4377
email jbudig@vunet.vinu.edu

JC 950 198

Postcards for Student Success

Abstract: Aware of the high correlation between class attendance and academic success, Vincennes University implemented a project designed to improve class attendance. This paper describes the Attendance Notification System, its utilization, its acceptance by faculty and students, and its impact.

Aware of the high correlation between class attendance and academic success, Vincennes University implemented a project designed to improve class attendance. The challenge was to develop a system for notifying students early when class absences began to undermine the likelihood of a passing grade. The criteria were that the system must be ***effective, immediate,*** and ***not labor intensive.*** The system has now been in place for five years.

Using the automation capabilities of the mainframe computer, V.U. designed a "blue card" which students are asked to sign during the first week of class. The card verifies a local address, and the student's signature allows the release of academic information. Instructors begin classes by discussing the importance of attendance and explaining that the "tear-off" portions of the blue cards would be used to notify students that the instructor was concerned about their absences.

When students begin to miss class, the instructor tears off the first part of a computer-generated ticket. A 10-keystroke input generates two postcards, one to the student's local address and one to his permanent address; the cards indicate concern over non-attendance. Further absences generate a second, more strongly worded postcard. A third tear-off generates a letter to the student that he/she has been dropped for non-attendance and has received a grade of W or WF. A copy of this letter is sent to the Records Office for the permanent file.

The cost of the program is nominal. Programming was a one-time effort. Printing costs are approximately $165 per year and postage was under $300 last year.

Support for the Program

Parents unanimously support the program, often calling or writing the president to express their appreciation. Students rather unanimously dislike the program on the grounds that they are still being treated like high schoolers. (These are the same students who demand 24-hr dorm visitation hours "to study" with a member of the opposite sex.) It should be mentioned that the responsible students who do *not* miss class are totally unaffected by the project.

There was -- and continues to be -- a degree of faculty resistance to the program, on philosophical grounds that these students are now adults and should take responsibility for their own actions. However, many faculty have been swayed by the argument, "if you were spending $3000 or so per semester for your son or daughter to attend college, wouldn't you like to know when they are missing classes?"

Academic advisors express their gratitude. The system periodically generates for them a list of their major who have received attendance notification, frequently from courses outside the major field of study. This is the first time this information had been available.

Have '"Blue Cards" made a difference?

Analysis of pilot study data found a 2-3% reduction in D/F/WF grades. The effect was most pronounced in basic developmental mathematics classes--a 17% decrease in D/F/WF grades and a 14% increase in A/B/C grades. The results were significant among classes scheduled at 8:00 a.m. or in the evening--a 4% increase in A/B/C grades. For the 8:00 A.M. and evening basic developmental math classes, there was a gain of 33% in the success rate and concurrent decrease of 33% in D/F/WF grades.

Since 1990 there have been a great many changes at V.U., particularly in the grading system, probation standards, and curriculum. It is not possible to isolate the effects of this one

component of the University's enrollment management program. The only way to ascertain the impact of this system would be to discontinue it for a term, which we are not willing to do.

One particular advantage, from an institutional research viewpoint, is the availability of data on approximately what proportion of students, in lower level courses at an open admissions residential college, are in jeopardy of academic success because they miss class. The topic is given broad coverage in the literature, but I do not believe an actual data exists elsewhere.

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Research Report

Use of the Attendance Notification System

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

V.U. Research Report 94-56 December 1994

Use of the Attendance Notification System

In 1990 Vincennes University implemented an *Attendance Notification System* whereby faculty members could easily notify students when class absence began to jeopardize their academic success. The System has been in use for five years now. *The purpose of this study* is to report on the continued use of Attendance Notification cards. The *data source* is the Attendance System Usage Report # IB0077, Fall semester 1990 - 1994.

Figure I is the proportion of students, by division, who received *first notification cards.*

Figure II is the proportion of students, by division, who received *second notification cards.*

Figure III is the proportion of students, by division, who received *dropped from class for non-attendance notification cards.*

The Appendix gives actual utilization of cards by division and total number of enrolled students (duplicate count) for each division from Fall 1990 to Fall 1994.

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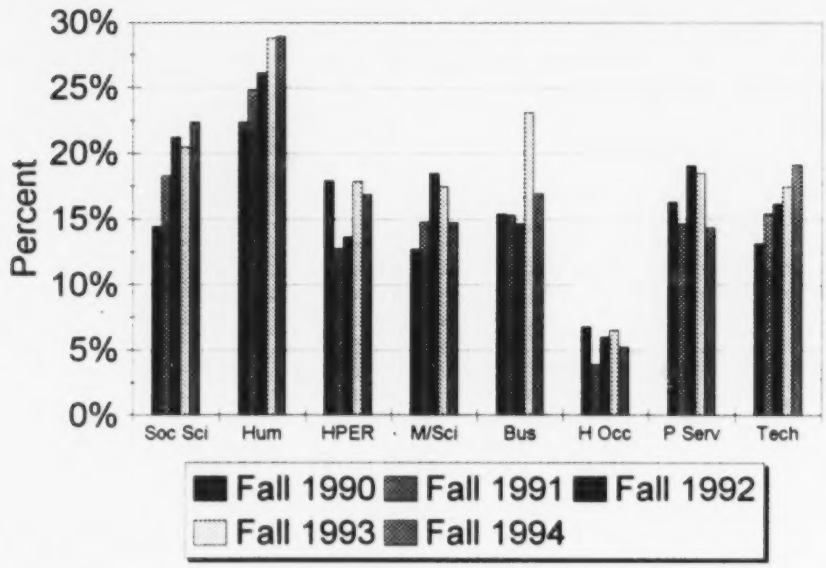
ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Received Card # 1



Proportion of Students who Received First Card

DIVISION	*Fall 1990*	*Fall 1991*	*Fall 1992*	*Fall 1993*	*Fall 1994*
Soc Sci	0.1441	0.1832	0.2122	0.2048	0.2236
Hum	0.2235	0.2484	0.2610	0.2879	0.2891
HPER	0.1793	0.1273	0.1359	0.1789	0.1687
M/Sci	0.1269	0.1477	0.1849	0.1748	0.1471
Bus	0.1535	0.1531	0.1461	0.2315	0.1697
H Occ	0.0677	0.0390	0.0594	0.0648	0.0520
P Serv	0.1628	0.1465	0.1908	0.1852	0.1430
Tech	0.1313	0.1544	0.1616	0.1749	0.1916

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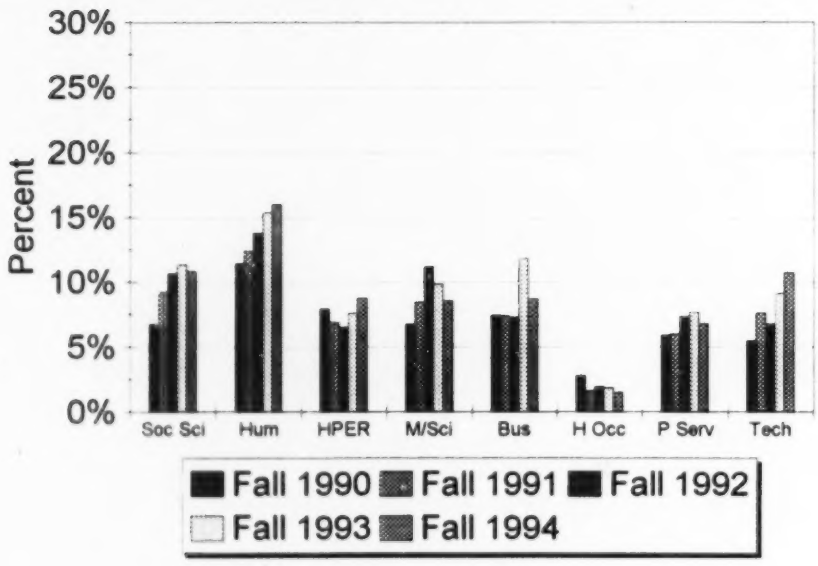
ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Received Card # 2



Proportion of Students who Received Second Card

DIVISION	*Fall 1990*	*Fall 1991*	*Fall 1992*	*Fall 1993*	*Fall 1994*
Social Science	0.0670	0.0918	0.1061	0.1130	0.1080
Humanities	0.1140	0.1235	0.1375	0.1535	0.1597
HPER	0.0790	0.0685	0.0651	0.0757	0.0870
Science/Math	0.0670	0.0841	0.1115	0.0978	0.0854
Business	0.0737	0.0732	0.0724	0.1180	0.0865
Health Occupations	0.0279	0.0163	0.0195	0.0185	0.0147
Public Service	0.0589	0.0595	0.0726	0.0763	0.0677
Technology	0.0548	0.0760	0.0678	0.0907	0.1071

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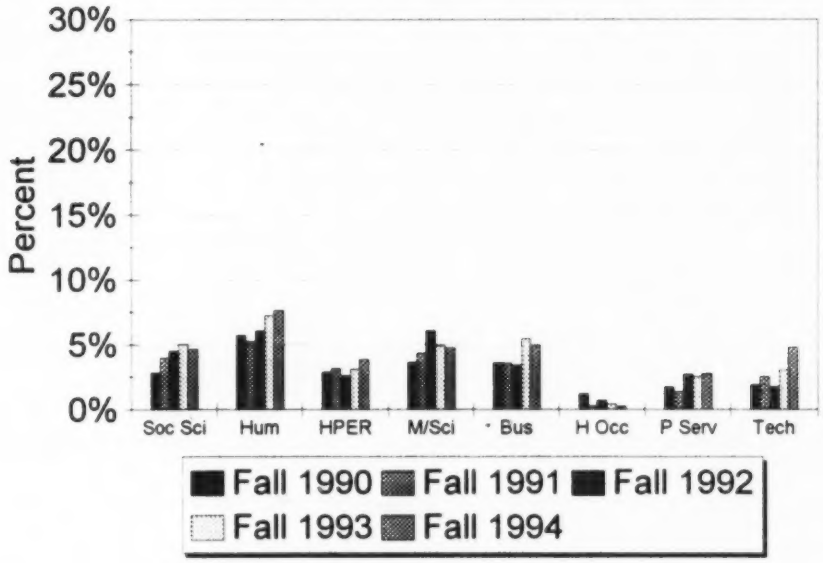
ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Dropped for Non-Attendance



Proportion of Students who were Dropped for Non-Attendance

DIVISION	*Fall 1990*	*Fall 1991*	*Fall 1992*	*Fall 1993*	*Fall 1994*
Social Science	0.0284	0.0397	0.0450	0.0505	0.0465
Humanities	0.0572	0.0526	0.0607	0.0727	0.0766
HPER	0.0290	0.0317	0.0263	0.0309	0.0387
Science/Math	0.0362	0.0433	0.0609	0.0492	0.0474
Business	0.0357	0.0355	0.0339	0.0542	0.0492
Health Occupations	0.0119	0.0027	0.0065	0.0042	0.0023
Public Service	0.0171	0.0140	0.0269	0.0252	0.0276
Technology	0.0193	0.0252	0.0179	0.0305	0.0480

Findings

1. Overall card usage has increased each fall semester since 1990, from 5,529 (card #1's) issued in 1990 to 6,230 in Fall 1994. The maximum utilization was in Fall 1993 when 6,936 #1 Cards were sent.

2. Campus-wide, about 20% of the students receive Card # 1. In Fall 1990 it was 16.25%.

3. *Students enrolled in academic transfer courses are more likely to receive #1 cards than students in occupational courses.* The proportion of academic transfer students receiving cards in 1990 was 17.31%, and in 1994 was 22.00%. The proportion of occupational students receiving #1 cards in 1990 was 14.23% and in 1994 was 15.29%.

4. Students enrolled in Humanities and in Social Sciences courses are more likely to receive #1 cards. Since fall 1992, 20-23% of students in Social Sciences courses and 25-28% of students in Humanities courses received #1 cards.

This suggests that *students are more likely to exhibit attendance problems in general education courses rather than courses within their majors.* However, the possibility that Humanities and Social Sciences faculty are more vigorous in their use of cards cannot be ruled out.

5. Card usage is *lowest* in the Health Occupations division, at about five percent. This is no doubt due to the selective admissions into Health Occupations programs.

6. "Average" utilization is shown by the HPER, Science/Math, Business, Public Service, and Technology divisions, where about 15% of the students receive #1 cards. Dean Smith might be interested in exploring why the Business Division sent so many cards in Fall 1993.

7. Card usage is steadily increasing in the Technology division. Does this increase reflect a change in class attendance patterns among Technology students, or of support of the "blue card" system by faculty?

Findings (Continued)

Receipt of Second Card

8. The proportion of students receiving the second card has risen since 1990 in Social Sciences, Humanities and Technology. It has remained fairly constant in HPER and the Business Division.

9. Approximately HALF the number of students who receive #1 cards then receive #2 cards.

Withdrawal by the Instructor for Non-Attendance (WF, card #3)

10. Approximately 5% of the students in all divisions except Health Occupations were withdrawn for non-attendance. The rate is higher the last two years in the Business and Humanities division, and is approximately 7.5% in Humanities.

Does the Attendance Notification Card System Make a Difference?

1. Results of a pilot-test (IR # 890-09) suggested that use of the "blue card system" enhanced student success (more grades A,B,C, or P), and reduced the proportion of D/F grades, particularly for students in developmental courses and for courses beginning early in the morning.

2. If #2 cards are one-half the number of #1 cards, then the first card had an impact. Did it make the student start attending class, or *did it counsel the student toward early voluntary withdrawal?*

A review of the voluntary withdrawal rates since 1990 (Student Success in courses, five year summary) *does not suggest* a clear increase in the proportion of students withdrawing from courses in any area or division.

Nor does a review of the proportion of students being successful in courses reveal a clear increase in student success for any division. But there has been a great deal of curriculum revision over this time period. Moreover, as many of the courses became designated as "protected", the population enrolled in those courses is not comparable from 1990 to 1994.

One must look elsewhere for evidence of the success of this system. One source of anecdotal evidence is the record of positive reaction to the system by parents who call the office of the Dean of Students. Those calls continue to be largely, if not exclusively, in support of the system.

A second pattern of evidence is increasing utilization of the cards by faculty. This suggests that faculty do think that the system is having a positive impact. Among the comments received from Deans when they were asked about positive impacts of the program were the following:

"Knowing attendance performance of their advisees is important."

"We were able to save students who were not attending classes outside their major."

"The system allows fewer students to 'slip through the cracks'."

"I believe they primarily achieve two goals: the awakening of the student to the fact that we are interested in them and keeping track of their behavior (in the form of attendance), and it probably serves to keep the faculty more accountable for reporting."

"It serves the purpose of keeping parents informed who often are in a better position to motivate their own. Additionally , the system of notification provides recorded "evidence" of how instructors had attempted to warn of impending academic problems in the event they (instructors) would need to defend the grading of lower grades.

The only negative attitudes toward the Attendance Notification System appears to come from students, who say it's too strict; it treats them like high school kids; it fails to let them develop and exercise responsibility. (*Trailblazer*, March 27, 1992). But Dean Weaver notes that the students who *are mature* and responsible do not receive nor require notification of poor attendance.

ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

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FALL 1994

DIVISION	# OF STUDENTS (Dup. Count)	# Rec'd Card 1	Percent	# Rec'd Card 2	Percent	# Rec'd Card D	Percent
Social Science	4083	913	22.36%	441	10.80%	190	4.65%
Humanities	8104	2343	28.91%	1294	15.97%	621	7.66%
HPER	2585	436	16.87%	225	8.70%	100	3.87%
Science/Math	6078	894	14.71%	519	8.54%	288	4.74%
TOTAL ACADEMIC	20850	4586	22.00%	2479	11.89%	1199	5.75%
Business	2498	424	16.97%	216	8.65%	123	4.92%
Health Occupation	1289	67	5.20%	19	1.47%	3	0.23%
Public Service	3735	534	14.30%	253	6.77%	103	2.76%
Technology	3231	619	19.16%	346	10.71%	155	4.80%
TOTAL OCCUP.	10753	1644	15.29%	834	7.76%	384	3.57%
TOTAL UNIVERSIT	31603	6230	19.71%	3313	10.48%	1583	5.01%

SOURCE Attendance System Usage Report # 1B0077 Fall 1994
Comprehensive Enrollment Report, End of Semester Fall 1994

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ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

FALL 1993

DIVISION	# OF STUDENTS (Dup. Count)	# Rec'd Card 1	Percent	# Rec'd Card 2	Percent	# Rec'd Card D	Percent
Social Science	4355	892	20.48%	492	11.30%	220	5.05%
Humanities	8660	2493	28.79%	1329	15.35%	630	7.27%
HPER	2722	487	17.89%	206	7.57%	84	3.09%
Science/Math	6338	1108	17.48%	620	9.78%	312	4.92%
TOTAL ACADEMIC	22075	4980	22.56%	2647	11.99%	1246	5.64%
Business	2618	606	23.15%	309	11.80%	142	5.42%
Health Occupation	1189	77	6.48%	22	1.85%	5	0.42%
Public Service	3655	677	18.52%	279	7.63%	92	2.52%
Technology	3408	596	17.49%	309	9.07%	104	3.05%
TOTAL OCCUP.	10870	1956	17.99%	919	8.45%	343	3.16%
TOTAL UNIVERSIT	32945	6936	21.05%	3566	10.82%	1589	4.82%

SOURCE Attendance System Usage Report # 1B0077 Fall 1993
Comprehensive Enrollment Report, End of Semester Fall 1993

ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

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FALL 1992

DIVISION	# OF STUDENTS (Dup. Count)	# Rec'd Card 1	Percent	# Rec'd Card 2	Percent	# Rec'd Card D	Percent
Social Science	4269	906	21.22%	453	10.61%	192	4.50%
Humanities	8965	2340	26.10%	1233	13.75%	544	6.07%
HPER	2810	382	13.59%	183	6.51%	74	2.63%
Science/Math	7065	1306	18.49%	788	11.15%	430	6.09%
TOTAL ACADEMIC	23172	4934	21.29%	2657	11.47%	1240	5.35%
Business	2833	414	14.61%	205	7.24%	96	3.39%
Health Occupation	1228	73	5.94%	24	1.95%	8	0.65%
Public Service	3637	694	19.08%	264	7.26%	98	2.69%
Technology	3626	586	16.16%	246	6.78%	65	1.79%
TOTAL OCCUP.	11324	1767	15.60%	739	6.53%	267	2.36%
TOTAL UNIVERSIT	34496	6701	19.43%	3396	9.84%	1507	4.37%

SOURCE Attendance System Usage Report # 1B0077 Fall 1992
Comprehensive Enrollment Report, End of Semester Fall 1992

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ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

FALL 1991

DIVISION	# OF STUDENTS (Dup. Count)	# Rec'd Card 1	Percent	# Rec'd Card 2	Percent	# Rec'd Card D	Percent
Social Science	4563	836	18.32%	419	9.18%	181	3.97%
Humanities	9012	2239	24.84%	1113	12.35%	474	5.26%
HPER	2364	301	12.73%	162	6.85%	75	3.17%
Science/Math	6586	973	14.77%	554	8.41%	285	4.33%
TOTAL ACADEMIC	22525	4349	19.31%	2248	9.98%	1015	4.51%
Business	2842	435	15.31%	208	7.32%	101	3.55%
Health Occupation	1103	43	3.90%	18	1.63%	3	0.27%
Public Service	3986	584	14.65%	237	5.95%	56	1.40%
Technology	3777	583	15.44%	287	7.60%	95	2.52%
TOTAL OCCUP.	11708	1645	14.05%	750	6.41%	255	2.18%
TOTAL UNIVERSIT	34233	5994	17.51%	2998	8.76%	1270	3.71%

SOURCE Attendance System Usage Report # 1B0077 Fall 1991
Comprehensive Enrollment Report, End of Semester Fall 1991

ATTENDANCE NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

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FALL 1990

DIVISION	# OF STUDENTS (Dup. Count)	# Rec'd Card 1	Percent	# Rec'd Card 2	Percent	# Rec'd Card D	Percent
Social Science	4790	690	14.41%	321	6.70%	136	2.84%
Humanities	8520	1904	22.35%	971	11.40%	487	5.72%
HPER	2381	427	17.93%	188	7.90%	69	2.90%
Science/Math	6595	837	12.69%	442	6.70%	239	3.62%
TOTAL ACADEMIC	22286	3858	17.31%	1922	8.62%	931	4.18%
Business	2971	456	15.35%	219	7.37%	106	3.57%
Health Occupation	1005	68	6.77%	28	2.79%	12	1.19%
Public Service	4041	658	16.28%	238	5.89%	69	1.71%
Technology	3723	489	13.13%	204	5.48%	72	1.93%
TOTAL OCCUP.	11740	1671	14.23%	689	5.87%	259	2.21%
TOTAL UNIVERSIT	34026	5529	16.25%	2611	7.67%	1190	3.50%

SOURCE Attendance System Usage Report # 1B0077 Fall 1990
Comprehensive Enrollment Report, End of Semester Fall 1990